

States, it is no surprise that the idea of Flag Day originated there.

**MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND
VETERANS AFFAIRS AND RE-
LATED AGENCIES APPROPRIA-
TIONS ACT, 2012**

SPEECH OF

HON. MAZIE K. HIRONO

OF HAWAII

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 2, 2011

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 2055) making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2012, and for other purposes:

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. Chair, I rise in support of H.R. 2055, the Military Construction-Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2012. This bipartisan bill passed the Appropriations Committee by unanimous voice vote, and I urge my colleagues to support it on the House floor today.

To support those who have put their lives on the line for our country, this bill provides disability payments, pensions, survivors' benefits, and education benefits under the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill.

The ward in Iraq and Afghanistan have taken a major toll on our brave men and women in uniform. We must take care of our veterans' mental and physical health needs as they return home and transition to civilian life.

Today's bill provides \$129.7 billion for the Veterans Affairs Department for Fiscal Year 2012. The Veterans Health Administration serves over 4 million patients. Continuing the practice the Democratic Congress started in 2009, the bill provides advance appropriations for VA medical accounts for both the next and the following fiscal years. Our veterans deserve the certainty of knowing there will be enough funds, in advance, for the care they have earned and deserve.

Of the more than 50,000 veterans in my district—rural Oahu and the Neighbor Islands—many live in rural areas. The veterans I have met with cite difficulty in getting to medical care in Honolulu from the Neighbor Islands, as well as not enough services on their own islands. Today's bill includes \$250 million for innovations to improve health care access for rural veterans. These include providing VA outpatient care through community-based outpatient clinics and completing a feasibility study on mobile health services, home-based care, and telemedicine.

Today's bill also provides \$11.5 billion for military construction, a 4 percent increase over current levels. Hawaii has many military bases, and this bill will support the construc-

tion of housing and other facilities on our bases, sending a positive ripple effect throughout Hawaii's economy.

Today I am voting for the LaTourette amendment on Project Labor Agreements. This amendment would restore President Obama's executive order encouraging Federal agencies to consider requiring Project Labor Agreements for construction contracts. Project Labor Agreements are short-term agreements for the length of a project that can reduce projects' costs and duration. Project Labor Agreements strengthen project quality by helping the Federal Government specify the project requirements in advance. This is the third time this year that this Congress has tried to undermine Project Labor Agreements. Fortunately, amendments to preserve Project Labor Agreements passed the last two times; I hope the LaTourette amendment will also pass.

I am opposing the Amash amendment that would try yet again to eliminate Davis-Bacon prevailing wage protections. This is yet another attack on working families. The Davis-Bacon Act prevents contractors from driving down wages and benefits in an area. Amendments to eliminate Davis-Bacon protections have failed again and again this year, and I hope the Amash amendment will meet the same fate.

Overall, the underlying bill supports our veterans and military construction in Hawaii, and I urge my colleagues to support it.

OMARSKA

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 14, 2011

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, some of us in this chamber today were here 20 years ago when the conflicts associated with Yugoslavia's demise began, and we heard the reports of horrible atrocities as they were taking place. I followed the situation closely as a member of the Helsinki Commission, which I chair today. The names of many of the villages, towns and even cities mentioned were new to our ears then, but they have since been etched into our minds and hearts by the savage acts that were committed in or near them.

One such place is Omarska, in northwestern Bosnia near Prijedor. We first heard of it in the summer of 1992. That is when Roy Gutman, a foreign correspondent working for Newsday, reported on the existence, at a mining complex, of a camp run by Bosnian Serb militants that held several thousand non-Serb prisoners, primarily Bosniaks but also Croats. Based on the later reports of the detainees who survived their ordeal at Omarska, Gutman called it a "death camp" and reported on the

appalling conditions and the rape, torture and execution of detainees there as well as at other camps in the vicinity. International reporting, especially by British journalists Ed Vulliamy, Penny Marshall and Ian Williams, exposed the horrors of Omarska and ultimately forced the camp to close.

Before Omarska, Mr. Speaker, many commentators on the Balkan conflicts which began in Slovenia and Croatia before moving to Bosnia tried to explain away an unpleasant but allegedly unavoidable and manageable reality.

After Omarska, it became clear to many people that, in Bosnia, we were dealing with evil on such a scale that can neither be explained away nor ignored. Eventually, the internationally community organized an international tribunal to prosecute war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide in the former Yugoslavia. The tribunal convicted several of the camp guards, commandants and associated others for crimes committed at Omarska.

In late May, Omarska survivors and families of victims were able to gather at the site of the camp, both to remember and to remind. They were joined by senior Bosnian officials, representatives of the international community including the US Embassy, and supportive non-governmental organizations from Serbia. The survivors, however, want an appropriate memorial that would protect the site and to which there could be public access not just for one day, but regularly throughout the year. As those gathered in Omarska themselves declared, "we deem that the sufferings of civilians in Omarska concentration camp, as well as in other concentration camps formed during the wars in the Nineties, must be honorably commemorated so as to become part of public memory, on the path towards establishment of the co-habitation in the areas of the former Yugoslavia."

The horrors that took place at Omarska and their lasting impact on Bosnian society certainly warrant such a memorial. It would provide some closure to victims, and it would counter those who are still unwilling to acknowledge the horrific crimes that, in undeniable fact, were committed there in 1992. It would also serve as a lasting reminder to us all. If atrocities on the scale of those at the Omarska camp are not appropriately remembered, they are more likely to be repeated, in some other distant town or village presently unknown to us. That is why we have these memorials: in the hope we will never forget nor ever allow such crimes to be repeated.

As the Chairman of the Bosnian Caucus, I encourage the present owners of the mining complex to permit and support the establishment of a permanent memorial at Omarska. I bring this issue to the attention of my colleagues in the hope they can join me in this call.